

Joint statement from Intervention Rollback Action Group (Central Australia), Darwin Aboriginal Rights Coalition and Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney - Friday November 25 2011

Stand against Macklin's decade of discrimination - No second Intervention!

The Labor government has introduced *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* legislation that extends the racist NT Intervention for a further ten years.

Intergenerational trauma caused by past policies of assimilation and dispossession is at the root of many problems facing Aboriginal communities across Australia today.

Now under Labor's plans, NT Aboriginal children turning fifteen in 2022 will have lived their entire life as second class citizens under Australian law.

The persecution of Aboriginal people under the Intervention has had horrendous consequences. Reported rates of attempted suicide and self-harm have more than doubled (Closing the Gap Monitoring Report). Indigenous incarceration has increased by 40 per cent. Large numbers of people are drifting away from their homelands as resources and opportunity are withdrawn from the bush.

None of this was even acknowledged in the more than 1000 pages of reports released by the government in the past month to justify the second Intervention. Other indicators of growing social crisis have been buried away from the headlines.

Minister Jenny Macklin claims her new laws are the fruit of consultation with Aboriginal people across the NT and a survey conducted in 16 communities.

But this consultation process was a sham. In numerous remote community meetings for which we have records, none of these reforms were even raised for discussion. Similarly, the "community safety and wellbeing survey" never sought Aboriginal consent or agreement for any Intervention law.

Explicitly racist laws, which vilify Aboriginal people and culture are being kept on the books including:

- "Star Chamber" powers held by the Australian Crime Commission for investigations in Aboriginal communities, including removal of the right to silence. This despite the ACC dismissing the disgraceful allegations that "pedophile rings" were operating in Indigenous communities, which led then Minister Mal Brough to legislate the powers.

- Prohibition of consideration of Aboriginal customary law and cultural practice in bail and sentencing. Chief Justice Riley of the NT Supreme Court has said this measure means, "Aboriginal offenders do not enjoy the same rights as offenders from other sections of the community".

- Blanket bans on alcohol on Aboriginal Land, despite consistent opposition from the Aboriginal

Peak Organisations of the NT (APO NT) who have said, "The decision regarding alcohol restrictions should be for relevant residents to make... The principal effect of these widely flouted laws has been to further criminalise and alienate many residents".

- Blanket bans on "sexually explicit or very violent material" on Aboriginal Land. These restrictions serve no purpose other than the perverse stigmatisation of Aboriginal men.
- Continued suspension of the operations of the permit system in Aboriginal townships, again in direct contradiction of APO NT who said, "communities on Aboriginal Land feel as though they have lost control... the flow on effects are overwhelmingly seen as negative and counterproductive to community safety".

Both the Human Rights Commission and visiting UN representatives have consistently rejected the characterisation of these measures as "special measures" under the *Racial Discrimination Act*.

Proposed amendments to the *Social Security Act* will see further attacks on the rights of Centrelink recipients. These measures will initially be targeted at NT Aboriginal peoples, but have implications for all poor and marginalised communities across Australia.

- An expansion of the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM) means chronic school attendance problems could see families cut off certain Centrelink payments entirely.
- Staff from nominated government agencies will have the power to summarily order people onto Income Management in the same way that Child Protection agencies currently do.
- Staff from nominated government agencies will be able to pass on information about clients to Centrelink, even if doing so contravenes State or Territory law.
- Income Management will follow you even if you move out of an Income Management area.

Many Aboriginal leaders used consultation meetings to protest against racist control measures and demand jobs, resources, community control over development and respect for Aboriginal culture, law and land rights.

7 of the 12 communities being targeted by the SEAM expansion operated bilingual programs, before they were shut down in 2008. Demand for the re-instatement of bilingual education was clear across the consultations.

The *Stronger Futures* jobs package is an insult. 50 new ranger positions and 100 "traineeships" will not compensate for the more than 2000 remaining waged CDEP positions the government will cut next April, the final nail in the coffin of a vibrant program which was the lifeblood of many communities, employing upwards of 7500 people before the NTER.

The government's commitment of public sector work for Aboriginal people completing year 12 will only apply to designated "growth towns". Similarly, there has been no lifting of a moratorium on new housing outside the "growth towns" despite desperate, ongoing need. The government's

own evaluation says that the 2007-8 average occupancy rate in NT communities was 9.4 people per dwelling - and the aim post-Intervention is 9.3!

The ongoing restriction of increased investment to "growth towns" was vigorously opposed across the consultation meetings.

Without CDEP, their community councils or hopes of investment into the future, many Aboriginal communities are fighting for their very survival. And racist laws and ideologies propagated through the Intervention are creating apartheid conditions in major NT centres.

We are very encouraged to see a joint statement from the Australian Council of Social Services, the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT and many others calling for these new laws to be immediately withdrawn.

A campaign calling for a moratorium on government Income Management is gaining momentum, with a strong campaign in Bankstown pledging to stop its implementation in 2012. The success of this fight would be a serious blow against the Intervention.

The demands for Aboriginal self-determination and increased resources for all communities outlined in *Rebuilding from the Ground Up: An Alternative to the NT Intervention*, have never been more urgent. This program now has the support of campaign groups across Australia, along with Aboriginal peak bodies such as Tangentyere Council, the full-council of the Central Land Council and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency.

In the face of Macklin's decade of discrimination, our groups pledge to redouble our efforts to build the resistance across the NT and Australia. All communities are viable - racism is not!

For comment contact:

Paddy Gibson, Stop the Intervention Collective Sydney 0415 800 586

John Leemans, Gurindji spokesperson and Intervention Rollback Action Group member 0438 345 155

For more info on our campaign groups:

www.stoptheintervention.org

www.rollbacktheintervention.wordpress.com

darwinaboriginalrights.wordpress.com

Joint statement from ACOSS, APO NT and others:

www.acoss.org.au/media/release/cooperation_not_intervention_a_call_for_a_new_direction_in_policies_affecti

More info on "Stronger Futures" and the consultation process:

stoptheintervention.org/facts/consultations-mid-2011

concernedaustralian.com.au